

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

DR. GAYLE N. HUFFORD

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INTERVIEWEE: DR. GAYLE N. HUFFORD

INTERVIEWERS: MICHAEL BARR  
MICHAEL JACOBS

BARR: This is an interview with Dr. Gayle N. Hufford, 116 Seeser Street, Joliet, Illinois, November 1972.

BARR: Where were you born, Doctor?

HUFFORD: I was born in southeastern Indiana right on the Ohio River just about 40 miles from Cincinnati, Ohio.

BARR: And what was the date?

HUFFORD: April 18, 1892.

BARR: How long did you stay in the place where you were born?


HUFFORD: I went to college at Hanover, which is about 35 miles from my home. So I went to live with my folks until I got through college. That was just before the first world war started.

BARR: Then you came to Joliet from there?

HUFFORD: No, I went to the first war. When I graduated, I came to a town called Paw Paw, Illinois about 40 miles west of Aurora. That was my first teaching and coaching position. Then I went up to the war from there. After the war I came back to St. Charles, Illinois, where I was principal of the high school and the coach. I came to Joliet in 1924, to Joliet Township High School.

BARR: How long did you teach at Joliet High School?

HUFFORD: Thirteen and a half years. I taught there from 1924 to 1937.



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I left there in January of 1937 to become superintendent of the elementary schools. I was superintendent of the schools for 20 years. I retired from there in 1958. Then I taught for 11 years out at Lewis College and organized their education department. I retired from there about 3 years ago. So I had 55 years in the teaching profession.

BARR: That is quite a while. What do you remember about the depression? When the depression hit? What the schools went through?

HUFFORD: I was taking work at the University of Chicago and went to catch the train one morning in 1929 and the Union National Bank was closed. That was the beginning of the depression as far as I was concerned. We had our money tied up in the bank. I had just paid a \$500 payment on this house and the check didn't clear. So I lost that \$500. So we really were hit by the depression. The schools were also hit. However, the enrollment was down. There was a feeling that school population had leveled off. There wouldn't be any more increases. I think when I became superintendent, there were about 550 enrolled and we just had to live. I was at the high school at that time. We didn't get paid. We got scrip, but it wasn't negotiable. And the only two places in town where we could buy food was the Boston Store and a little grocery store over here on the corner. And that is the reason I always held high regard for Mr. Felman, because teachers could buy all they wanted from the Boston Store and pay when they finally got money. So we just had to live the best we could. Of course, there were rash streaks. A lot of things you couldn't get at all, but we got through it finally. Our younger son was born right when the depression started. That didn't make it any easier.





BARR: Didn't the high schools around Joliet have some kind of a program set up during the depression where they rationed out food and things?

HUFFORD: Yes, and the faculty organized to help students. Three years straight during the depression we gave a vaudeville show; and believe it or not, it was really pretty high-powered. We filled the house two or three nights each time and made it up. By doing that we actually gave free lunches to many students, and we gave help practically to all students. Practically all the men--it was the men's show--practically all the men in the high school took part in that show.

BARR: So the schools helped out during the depression by putting on a show?

HUFFORD: Of course, individual teachers did a lot too, to help their students in their own classes. I remember one girl particularly that came up from Rockdale, a beautiful girl and a very bright girl. She was on the honor roll--fainted in my class one day just from hunger; and from that time on I saw that she got food. She graduated from high school and junior college on the honor roll all the way through. She lives in California now. Her family was right out of Bedrock. They had very little to eat; most of what they had we just had so we gave it to them. There was a lot of families like that. That wasn't unusual at all.

BARR: There was a time when some people in education felt that if a student failed that they could just go on and not take the course again--and just try to cover up for it--and some people thought that the student should have to take the course again. And I was wondering how, back then, you felt about that.



HUFFORD: Well, the common practice, and I agreed with it, was that the student should repeat the course at least once to get the course. If there was any sense in giving it in the first place, why then he ought to get the course. If he couldn't get it one time, take it twice. But I think teachers are--I don't know how they are today--but back then teachers were very anxious to help students. Gave them a lot of time and there weren't too many failures. And like a lot of teachers I had, I served as a committee teacher. I would start with about 50 freshmen, more than that, about 100 freshmen; and I would be their advisor all the way through high school. And it was my job to see that they didn't fail if I could possibly help them. So that made a big difference. I learned to know those youngsters very well. They always came to me when they registered for their next courses. And they could come to me for help at any time, and their parents could come to see me. So there was no real effort to do everything you could to see that these kids didn't fail. But they had to repeat if they failed, if it was a repeat program.

BARR: Who was Mr. Spicer?

HUFFORD: Well, I called Mr. Spicer "the high school." He was the principal of the high school before I came here. My wife graduated from Joliet in 1910. He was principal then, and he was principal when I left there in 1937. And Joliet High School really was the efforts of C. E. Spicer more than anybody else. Superintendents came and went, but he just stayed on. I asked him one time why he didn't apply for superintendency, and he said he didn't want it; he would rather work just with the students. He was a great big fellow, had enormous hands. And when a kid went at him and he began to do this, the kid began to worry. /Laughter/ He really made Joliet High School what it was.





BARR: And did you work under or with Dr. Brown for a time?

HUFFORD: No, Dr. Brown's last year was just before I came to Joliet.

Dr. Smith was superintendent when I came. He followed Mr. Brown. My wife went to high school while Mr. Brown was there; I met him, but I was never associated with him in school.

JACOBS: Dr. Hufford, if you had any particular city administrations that you felt were particularly good for the Joliet Educational System from say 1910 on or so. . .

HUFFORD: Have any what?

JACOBS: City administrators or mayors have been particularly good for education in the city of Joliet or any of them particularly bad?

HUFFORD: Well, I don't think any particular ones had too much to do with schools. One man was very much interested in schools, was Mayor Jones. I think he's one of the most progressive mayors that held office since I was here. He was one of the big men up at the mill so he was very capable and he was good for schools and everything. But I have a feeling that for the most part, schools are more or less separate from the city administration. I am sure the mayors were all interested, but I don't think they made particular contributions. I think he made the most.

JACOBS: Taking it to a larger level, have there been any federal administrations that have been really good for education?

HUFFORD: Well. . . One of the first presidents that had a lot to do with education was the first one I voted for, President Wilson. President Wilson himself, you know, was a president of a university, had been; and



he fostered legislation that was very forward-looking, particularly economically; and of course, that affected education. After that I think most presidents were interested. President Eisenhower signed a number of bills that were good for education. And in state government, we had a number of governors that were very good for education. Governor Ogilvie, the last one, did a lot for education and there were a number ahead of him that contributed a lot to education. Of course, up until rather recent years, schools were strictly a local project. I remember a time when there was practically no such thing as state aid, but they didn't want to pay the money. They never exercised any control over schools whatever, and no federal aid. First federal aid we got in Joliet was when I was superintendent of schools. We got enough money to build Marquette Gardens just for people who were soldiers who were in the war. That was back during the depression and that was the beginning. That was just to build homes; and then, of course, they began to help pay for education until it got to be more and more. But I remember a time when there was no federal aid, and state aid was almost minimal. Schools were local deals all the way through. Of course, there is one thing that I think has been very interesting and that is the way people have come around to participate in schools. Again, when I was growing up, when I went to school myself, grade school, high school--parents just sent you to school and that was it. They never visited school or went to PTA's or anything like that. Now, since that time, practically every school today has some type of parent organization and they're active; they really do things. They have parent counsels, and in another way parents have become much more interested in being on school boards. So that today, as compared to the beginning of my life, there is a lot of parent participation in education. And everybody knows what's going on, you know. And they're





interested; and they speak their piece, too! Another thing that has developed during my lifetime is the teachers' union. I was superintendent of Joliet until 1958. First teachers' unions were organized, I think, about 1955. Up to that time we had the IEA, the Teachers National Educational Association, Illinois Education Association, or the Local. Then they organized the union, and the last 4 or 5 years of my life as superintendent many teachers, about half of them, joined the union; but most of them that joined were also still members of the other organization, too. So union activities were at a minimum. They have all developed since I left the superintendency; and, of course, they have become entirely different.

BARR: So the teachers' strike is a fairly recent thing? Do you think teachers should have the right to strike?

HUFFORD: Well, I don't think there is any question about right, if you just think for legal right; but I'm not. I'm old fashioned, I guess; but I'm not in sympathy with teachers' strikes because my big interest has always been to educate some youngsters. And it's in Chicago right now, and it is for the sixth day. Some million or so kids are out of school. And when they go back, it's going to take them a week or two if they ever get organized again. So they're paying an awful price. There is nobody that takes the price of teachers' strikes like the kids do. There is a question that the teachers have a right to strike, legally; but it is a moral question with me. I wouldn't under any circumstances--even if I belonged to a union--I wouldn't strike. But I have a lot of friends who do so. I am just saying that it's my opinion. It is a legal right, but I question the moral right for a teachers' strike.

BARR: But they have to be able to negotiate for a contract.





HUFFORD: Yes, I know. I have to confess that I am in the minority. More teachers today believe in teachers' strikes than don't. Although, even in Chicago there is quite a block of teachers who are not in sympathy with the strike, they're the ones that are teaching out of these gymnasiums and churches, still teaching today. It is just a personal feeling. Of course, they could always go back to the old days; they negotiated and never had strikes.

BARR: Can you think of any of the development of the racial problems in Joliet and in the high schools?

HUFFORD: Well, that's one of the saddest things that's going on. I never felt when I was teaching at high school that there was a particular problem. It was my feeling, and I think the feeling of all of us, faculty and among the students, that everybody was pretty well satisfied. I signed up to coach football at JT to help the lightweight football team and one of the best athletes we ever had in Joliet was Bill Booker, a Negro. And I also had him in class, a wonderful student. And he was one of the most popular fellows in high school, not because he was an athlete, but because he was Bill Booker; and everybody like him. There was a lot of them like that. There is a fellow that works down at Barrett's now--I get a Christmas card from him every year--that was on that football squad, and his name is Jerry Knight, one of the nicest fellows I've ever known, one of the best students, one of the best athletes. And it just wasn't a problem back there. How it developed, I don't know. But it has become a problem, and it's here in Joliet; there's no question about it. But I am glad to say I didn't have to live with it. In fact, I confess, that I am glad to be out of school work. I'm not mixed up with all of the things that are going



on right now. I think the effort to have schools integrate society is wrong. I think schools, when they were left alone, were integrated. Nobody. . . They didn't have that worry; but now they are trying to integrate schools, integrate society and it won't. . . You have to integrate society, and busing kids clear across town to. . . There was an old theory that was an educational theory for years and years and years all over the country that every elementary school kid should live within walking distance of a school. and that is where he should go to school. The elementary schools were sending them to that community and had fixed limits--3/4 of a mile for grade school kids, 1-1/2 miles for high school kids. So they could walk to get there, and the whole theory back then was that youngsters' education and their school life should be with the people they live with, in their community. Now you go to Chicago and the people's school life is 20 miles away from where they are living, and it doesn't work. You can't integrate society just by integrating the schools; at least that is my opinion. Now I don't know how well it works here in Joliet. I know they've had trouble at the schools--here at West--but didn't that finally work out fairly well or not, do you know?

JACOBS: Well, it seems. . . I haven't been there either in a few years, but it seemed all right by the time I graduated.

HUFFORD: Well, it is a sad deal. I think it is one of the saddest things on earth: society; racial prejudice.

BARR: Do you remember when the first black teacher was hired in Joliet?

HUFFORD: I remember very well, because I recommended it. One night at a school board meeting a group of Negroes came to the Board and wanted some black teachers. One of the finest black men in this town, I'll





name him because he is a good friend of mine and I highly admire him, Mr. Dillon. . . Do you know Dillon?

JACOBS: I am not sure.

HUFFORD: Very active among Negroes. . . And he said, "Well, can't you start with a Negro, just to get started?" And I said, "No sir, we'll do it when one comes by that has the qualifications. I'll recommend him." So the next year a girl by the name of Jaunita somebody, who was a graduate of St. Francis College, applied, a really bright girl--and I recommended her. She was the first Negro teacher hired. Went out to Thompson School. And the president of the board told me that the next day after she started to teach, an important parent called up and said, "I want my girl transferred from Thompson School." "Well, why do you want to transfer?" "Because they have that Negro teacher out there." So the president of the board said, "Well, we are not going to start doing that;" he said, "You just wait for a couple of months and see how this goes. We think she is well-qualified. Call me up in a couple of months and see how this is going." And he told me the fellow called him back in 3 or 4 days and said forget it. Said the girl said she is one of the best teachers she ever had. That was the first teacher hired in Joliet.

JACOBS: Do you remember what year that was?

HUFFORD: That was back there in the early '50's. She was a wonderful teacher. She just left a few years ago to get married. Now I think there are quite a number. I recommended at least a dozen Negro teachers; but I never believed, and I don't believe today, of giving a Negro a job just because he is a Negro. I don't think there is any sense in that idea.



If one is prepared, then I think he has an equal chance just as the other one; and I then try to give him a little edge, because he's Negro and he's equally prepared, but just because I know they are adult. But I never pass up a real well-qualified white person just to give a Negro a job. I don't believe in that at all, and it is not good for the Negroes. It will never get them anywhere, because they are going to live with that attitude more and more if you start doing it. I think that is one of the problems in Will County and Joliet, as well as this whole Chicago area. We have to keep working at it.

BARR: Tell us a little about your earlier life. Did you live in the Ohio River Valley?

HUFFORD: My father's farm was right on the Ohio River. It was a good river then. It was clean. We fished in the river; swam in it. I lived there on the farm; went to a country school for eight years. The high school was 4-1/2 miles away in a little town, Patriot. Sometimes we drove, and sometimes we walked that 4-1/2 miles up over the hill; but I loved it. The only thing wrong with farm life then was we didn't have tractors and machines. We had nothing but horses and mules. I always used to tell my dad that if we had a tractor I would have probably never left the farm because I really like it. And there were six of us in the family, five boys and a girl. We all went through high school and all graduated from the same college, Hanover College. All from that 40-acre farm. And I don't know how they did it, but I will tell you it didn't cost anything like it costs today to go to college. First two years in college I cooked for myself; and then another fellow and I, the best friend I had in college, we organized an eating club. We all just divided it up, paid for what it





cost at the end of the month. So I made it, and the last year I was in college two of my brothers were there. I was a senior, one was a sophomore, and one was a freshman. That was the hardest year. I remember when we left home to go to college, we went by boat down the Ohio River. My dad gave us \$39, six \$50; we took \$39 of it, not for tuition but they called it contingent fee, \$39 a student for a semester. I said "I don't think there is going to be any more money until Thanksgiving." So we go down, pay the \$39, we have \$11 left to take care of us until Thanksgiving. That's how hard college was. We all played on the football team. So we really lived. We didn't have money; but, boy, we had fun! We had a good life. We grew everything on that farm we had at dinner to eat, and lived big. When I was in college, I went home every summer and worked for my dad for a dollar a day. And the money I made through the summer would take me through college the next year. Another fellow on the football team and I went out on the farm and cut corn all morning and played football in the afternoon. Then I would go to the fraternity house and pick up half-a-dozen suits and press them before morning. That's the way I got through school. So I have a lot of admiration for these kids that have to do it. There are some of them that still do, you know. I don't know whether you did; but it wasn't easy, but it was wonderful. I graduated from Hanover in 1914; and there was a fellow that played football, a great big fellow, Ty Cobb we called him, who became superintendent of this town of Paw Paw. I knew him in football. And I was also in the glee club and he was in the glee club. He played the trombone. He wrote back to the president of the college and asked for a recommendation for somebody to come out and coach athletics for him. That's how I got to Illinois. So I went out there and coached everything that nobody else wanted, taught all



them and coached all the athletics. And I wanted to get to the war; I had my younger brother who was in the war. So I finally got an order from Washington to be enlisted and go overseas with his regiment. I was teaching school at 9:00 in the morning and I got a call from the telegraph office to go to Chicago and enlist. I called an assembly that afternoon, told the kids goodbye, and left. That was the end of Paw Paw. So I went through the war; then I came back. I ended up at St. Charles, Illinois. I was there for four years; then came to Joliet. So my experience was quite varied, but I liked it all. Well actually, when you hear about old Lewis, I really loved it out there I tell you. I really loved it at Lewis. That's a wonderful school. One thing, of course, that is most remarkable that I can never get over is the growth of this town. When we moved to Joliet, Reed Street was the end of Joliet. There was still a one-room school. Briggs School stood at the corner of Jefferson and Reed Street, and right back of that street was Honiotes' Red Barn. That's where the Honiotes Brothers started, the father, mother, and all the kids. And the road from Reed Street on out was nothing but a dirt road, not even good dirt. He used to drive the old Ford out to Troy over these gullies and rough roads, Gruffy Road, Reed Street, that was it. That was Joliet. Reeds Woods was the woods. There were just two families that lived in Reeds Woods, one was Mr. Givens who was in the Biology Department at Joliet High School, and Mr. Brockett who was in the Music Department. They lived right on Midland Avenue in the north corner of Reeds Woods; and I used to take my two boys and we went out right across the prairie-- between here from Raynor Avenue, nothing but prairie. Taking hikes through Reeds Woods. . . . Just an open woods, open prairie. . . Now you can't even imagine such a thing as that. It was the same south and east,





of course; but it rolls west. I was married in my wife's sister's home up across Raynor Avenue and when they built it back in the early part of this century, Raynor Avenue was the end of Joliet. The house and one other were the first two houses built on Raynor Avenue, and there wasn't anything west of that. So I've really seen this town grow, too. It is a great town; I like it. All these paved roads, interstate highways, all just things of very recent years. . . .There aren't too many people still living who remember those dirt roads out to Troy. Honiotes moved out to their present location. They were just there in the summer in tents, a big tent; and all the kids were little. I knew them all, all the boys, and one girl. Annie was the only girl in the family. I knew them all from the time they were kids. I think a lot of them. That's where we do all of our business--because I've known those kids since they grew up.

JACOBS: How would you say education has changed throughout the years?

HUFFORD: I think the main thing is the bonding of the curriculum; because when I went to school, it was strictly three hours. There wasn't anything else; there wasn't even any science, there was no science. One teacher taught all eight grades. In reading class where I learned reading, we had seven minutes for three kids. Whatever reading we had to do was in that seven minutes. I remember that. When I went to high school, the only science I got in high school was a class they called Physical Geography. They call it Earth Science today. Taught right out of the book. A fellow sat in his chair and taught it. We're right along the Ohio River and on the hills, and all kinds of trips we could have taken; but all we got was out of the book. Never a laboratory in high school. When I went to college, of course, I got into Biology and that became my field fin-





ally. I got my Doctor's Degree in Botany which is a pretty narrow field, but I love it. I didn't know anything about it particularly. I grew up on a farm; I knew all of that. But when I went off to this town of Paw Paw to teach, I had to teach Biology. If I had to teach it, I had to learn it. So I had to keep a day ahead of the kids, you see; and I got to liking it so well, I took my degree in it. In high school music, we had a little book called 100 Best Songs of America -- "Old Black Joe" and "Home Sweet Home" and like that; and in the morning, we would have a prayer and sing a song and that's the way the day started. That was the Music Department. Now look at music today; and look at science, social studies, All the social studies we had was just history, plain history. Finally when I was in high school, they organized a course called Civics and in some places they still call it Civics, but we call it Social Problems today or something like that. And you certainly had the course. Industrial Arts, nobody ever heard of industrial arts when I was going to high school; so the thing that has changed the most for the best is that today young people can go to high school, and they can get almost anything they want. And junior college--I don't know whether you know this or not...I don't know whether it is still a fact--but the years it was down at Central, they had a going promise that they would teach any course that you wanted if you could get at least 12 people for the course, and they could get somebody to teach it. Now that's pretty broad, and I think that's about the way junior college is today. . . . Here comes my wife; we're going to have a little interruption here. I think another thing that is very important is that students take much more heart in school work. ENTER: MRS HUFFORD. . . Say hello to the boys. This is Mr. Jacobs and this is Mr. Barr. We're on tape so you can go ahead. Student organizations, I don't know how many you be-



long to, but the only organized work we had in high school. . .of course, I went to a very small high school. The year I was a senior, we organized a basketball team. We played out on the ground; didn't have a gym, no music, no student organizations of any kind. My gosh, today they almost have to put a limit on them. Music organizations, language organizations, student government. When I was teaching at St. Charles, the junior high school organized the student government, and they had an adult by the name of Charles Seliko who they elected mayor. /Laughter/ And he had a city council, and they recommended what they were to have in school. The whole group went down to the city hall one day to visit city hall to learn how the government was run, and they came back disgusted. They could run St. Charles better than the city council was running it, and I believe they could. So there was a kid in high school who had a dog, Nigger, a little black dog. And he followed his master around and came to school with him. And, of course, the dog shouldn't come to school, so he appealed to the student government that they let Nigger come to school, make an exception. So it passed an ordinance that he could come to school if nobody would bother him. So he just followed Henry around. Wherever Henry went, there he went. And Henry would come into a study hall or classroom. Nigger would lie down by his chair; that was it. So when Henry got ready to graduate, of course, he came up. And so did Nigger graduate. /Laughter/ So the city council and the student government had an election and voted that Nigger should graduate. So the night they graduated, he got in the chair next to Henry and take it home. Now I tell you that because to me it marks a change in school life where students are recognized for more than just "you sit there and listen to what I tell you." You see, you can't imagine how much it was that way back when I was going to school. You just sat there and the teacher taught you.





He asked you a question and you answered; and he gave you a test and you answered it. You passed it; you went ahead; and if you didn't, you took it over. Now that deal we had at St. Charles was the first I ever knew of that sort of thing, but I am a great believer in it. We had a student government at J.T. and I'll tell you when it happened there. . . We had a wonderful football team, and we were going to play Freeport--big game of the year. The captain of the team and two other fellows were out to a party the night before and were drinking. They were bragging about it; and one member of the team, a wonderful fellow, he's an important man today, went to the coach and told him. He says, "We're going to lose this game tomorrow because these three fellows are not going to do a thing. They were out until 4:00 this morning." So they lost the game.

JACOBS: What did the coach do? Did he fire them?

HUFFORD: No, he just took it to the student council. And everybody said after it was all over that the student council was harder on those guys than any of the faculty or administration would have ever been. They canceled out athletics for the rest of their school life. They never again participated in sports at J.T. I was one of the advisors of the student council at the time; but when they made the decision, I was very surprised. We asked them, "Is this what you want to do?" "This is what we want to do." And those fellows never put up any argument either; they just. . . that was the end of it. Now, I'm telling you that because what you're interested in, I think, that's an angle that's brand new in American education for students to listen to and I'm sure that's the way it is out at junior college. And you take it for granted, but it wasn't always that way. I like it all. I've signed over 10,000 diplomas during my lifetime. /Laughter/ So I've known a lot of kids.





BARR: What changes do you think would be good in education to make it better?

HUFFORD: I think there should be more and more rapport between students and faculty. There is such a thing as discussion, and I suppose that's the kind you've had. When I went out to Lewis, discussion groups were rather uncommon, because in college, you know, you've got a lot of stuff to unload and discussion takes time. So I knew then what the students wanted. They said they wanted discussion, so two days a week I turned my classes over to the students. They would volunteer, and two to four of them would take charge of it and I learned from them just how important discussion groups are. They really lived for those two days. What I did the other three days didn't mean very much to them. But they loved those discussions; and it convinced me that even if you don't cover as much ground, and if you're in a class, particularly anything in the nature of social sciences, that you'd better limit it to a whole lot less material and not try to cover as much. But make it a discussion group with students and teachers all participating. I think a lot of teachers today pass it around and have different leaders. Have you ever been in classes like that? Well, I believe in that. That's another modern development that I think is very, very good; and that's going on clear down into the grade schools. Our neighbors here, a little girl, and other little girls, goes out in the new junior high school. And the little girl goes down to Sheridan and she's all hepped up because they have wonderful discussions down there. For the little kids, you know, they call it "Bring and Tell". You may remember that. Bring something from home and tell about it. A lot of older people think that's nonsense, but what does it do for the youngster? It makes that youngster feel important. They learn to talk: they



learn to think while they're talking; they learn to participate; they develop a wonderful, different feeling for a teacher doing that, you see. So my idea of a wonderful education system is one where you don't have a real air-tight division between the faculty and the students. The participation in class--in school activities all the way through---and I think that is becoming more and more into the practice, that changes colleges, affects colleges, too. More and more of that today is going on in colleges. Of course, that's one reason that young people today insist on having more of a voice. They have learned to do it, you know. It used to be "and you would be seen and not heard." That was almost the motto you lived by, but that isn't the way it is. I tell people when they complain about the modern youth always has to speak up and have its say. I say, "Don't blame them, blame us because that is what we did to education. We gave them a voice, and they're going to use it.." I think the average person that graduates --I've often said this--that the average kid who graduates from high school today has a broader, better education than I had when I graduated from college. I really believe that, because what I got was that "from me to you" idea. The teacher told me and I took it. I passed the course. I liked it, and I got it. But there wasn't any of that added pleasure that I might have had if there was more discussion between myself and my teachers. So, I think, within bounds of course, you can go to extremes with everything. I believe in discipline; believe me, I believe in discipline. I wouldn't take what goes on in some schools today as far as that's concerned. But you can have discipline without having that idea of "sit down there and behave yourself, don't open your mouth;" it doesn't have to be like that. I think discipline based on respect is more important than discipline based on fear, and that's the difference. I think





teachers today that do have discipline don't have to worry about discipline. Those that don't have it, probably should worry.

BARR: What were some of the main problems that you came up with as superintendent that you always had to deal with in Joliet?

HUFFORD: Well, of course, the big problem was to get enough money to keep everything going; but we managed. One of the biggest problems we had while I was superintendent that made it different back in the '50's, the late '50's, was to develop a unit system. You know what that is?

BARR: What kind of system?

HUFFORD: Unit system. The high school and elementary school all under the same board. We have what they call a dual system today. A high school board that runs the high school and a grade school board that runs the grade school. Now we belonged to the . . . Our conference, including Rockford, Freeport, LaSalle, all of those schools used to belong to that one. Joliet was the only one that had a dual system. There are two reasons why I believe in the unit system. One is the state believes in the unit system so you get more money for a unit system than you do for a dual system. It's been figured out right now that if they vote the unit system in Joliet they can get close to \$3 million more a year more state aid just for voting that system. Two years ago, Waukegan went--they were just like Joliet--they're about the same kind of a town. They voted for the unit system instead of the dual system and the fellow told me up there, says it makes over \$2 million a year more. But the other reason I believe in it, I think you can get a better coordinated program where you can pass from kindergarten all the way up from high school. Now there are



only a few schools left in Illinois that have dual systems, so certainly the great majority have unit systems. They must be pretty good. So I think that was one of the biggest things and there was a fellow here in the Chamber of Commerce, a Swede, that was one of the best ever. He was something that fellow was, and he took the lead. He organized committees and the Association of Commerce. Went out with this unit system and we lost it. It carried in town but it lost out in the rural districts, so we didn't get it. Now, both the grade schools and the high schools have real bad circumstances. You know they are both running behind, and they're trying to get laws changed that would give just as much money to the dual system as it will to the unit system. But they are not going to get it because the very reason why the state holds theirs is to get rid of the dual systems. So I can almost guarantee that within the next three years, no longer than three years, that it will come up again for a vote because it is beginning to get desperate. Schools are all hard up for money. Boy, look at Chicago's. They talk \$20 million deficit. I can't picture such figures. If they figure a million, two million dollar deficits here. There is a big difference between schools and a business. When prices go up for the steel company, they pass it on to the consumers. The schools can't pass it on. Their income is fixed and every year when prices go up more and more, schools get farther and farther behind. So, during my time it was no different than most superintendents. Financial problems were a real worry. We didn't have educational problems to speak of. I was very fortunate; I had a business manager by the name of Skeel, Gordon Skeel, who was recognized as one of the best school businessmen in the state of Illinois. He took care of all the business. I didn't have to worry about it at all. I had a man by the name of Geissler, I don't know





whether you know Elmer Geissler or not; he's on the school board now. His dad was the chief engineer. He took care of all the school property. I never had to think about it. And I had a woman in charge of the school program. So my job was easy. Every Monday morning I had a conference with those three people. They just kept everything going. But it was really wonderful. We were able to make a lot of changes. One thing we did while I was superintendent. . . When I became superintendent we had a sight-saving room over at Central School, at F. E. Marsh School. And we had two or three health rooms, one at Lincoln School and one at the old Central School and one at Broadway School. We started in to get special education programs. And during the time I was superintendent, and not just because of my work but because we had a wonderful fellow of the state by the name of Graham who pushed special education for crippled children and all these handicapped kids. He was so good that he's up at Northern now. They have a special education building named after him, the Graham Building. Did you ever go up there? Well, you remember that building. Well, Ray Graham was this fellow. I knew him real well, and he advised me, and I took his advise. We put in programs for sight-saving; hard-of-hearing; and health rooms; the slow learners; the EMH--you know what those are--The Educatable Mentally Handicapped; the MH kids; and even one for brain-damaged kids, the first one ever organized in the United States. It was up at Cunningham School. That's where these kids that had brain damage would go to school, and it was really weird. You go up there and the teacher was the boss. Even I couldn't get in there. She wouldn't let me in, but I was in there a couple or three times. The only kids in there had real brain damage, and they set facing the wall. The windows were all frosted so you couldn't see out, and nobody could see in. And there were no pictures on the wall, nothing, and no noise of any kind. Because they say in a case of brain-





damaged kids, everything excites them. They just go wild; they even get out of hand. So here sat these eight kids facing the wall separately, and the teacher teaching them. One of those kids graduated from college and is married. Graduated from a technical school and his doctor didn't have that much hope of him even living. So that's one of the things that I was proud of that we got. Then we put in a program for crippled children out at Thompson School. We had three rooms out there, one where they get the regular teaching, one where they get water therapy (a special water bath), and one for vocational training. And all those kids were hauled by Yellow Cab; and these Yellow Cab drivers were wonderful, just like a father. They would bring these kids, carry them in with their wheelchairs, and pick them up after school. And we had those youngsters that graduated. There's a little girl graduated there. She went there until she was through the sixth grade. She had polio. She was smart, keen from here up-- just like a rag doll down below. She got to the sixth grade, and the doctor said, "Well, she just can't go to junior high. It's just going to be too hard to get her in." So then we taught her by telephone. I don't know whether you know about this, but there is a telephone system for the kids. It's a special phone service. She would sit and listen to the classes at home. We had a lot of kids do this. And the kids could even talk to them at his home. So she graduated from the eighth grade by phone, and we went out to give her a diploma. There was her dog, her mother, her dad, her brother, and myself and the supervisor to give her a diploma. She's a wonderful musician, and she earns money by . . . she's an artist. The old Gerlach-Barklow Company that made calendars used to pay her good money to just draw designs for calendars. She's still living, a wonderful girl. I had her brother as a student down at Lewis. He's the organist at



St. Raymond's, or he was. A beautiful organ player. Now this education for the handicapped was a wonderful development. Before they had that, a kid who was crippled, couldn't hear, or couldn't see, he just lived like a vegetable at home, never got an education, hardly learned how to live at home. Now they do everything for him. We had a little fellow by the name of Grafinski. Maybe he was blind or born blind. He went to the sight-seeing group at F. E. Marsh and he had myopia, which is progressive, so they knew he was going to become blind--so the teacher taught him Braille before he went blind, and he graduated at F. E. Marsh. He couldn't go to Central Junior High because there was no way to take care of him. So they took him to Jacksonville; that's where they try to teach these kids a way to make a living. And what do you think they teach these blind kids: Piano tuning. Most piano tuners are blind; they have wonderful ears. So I lost track of Bob Grafinski. And one day he walked into my office with a white cane, totally blind. He got through at Jacksonville, and he was applying for a job at tuning all the pianos in the Joliet School system. I said, "Well, Bob, do you think you can do it?" He said, "I know I can do it." He said, "All I need is a janitor to show me where the pianos are, and the key for each building." And we turned out 56 pianos, upstairs, downstairs, all over. He tuned those pianos for two years. He used the money and went to the University of Chicago, and they gave him a reader and he got his degree at the University of Chicago. He went to the Herald-News and later he obtained his Doctorate's Degree at the University of Minnesota and is going to be in charge of the whole state program for the handicapped in Minnesota. Think of that one. If it hadn't been for that special education program, nobody would have ever heard of Bob Grafinski and these crippled kids. Caterpillar makes a special effort to hire handicapped people. Did you know that? Anybody who's handicapped





goes down there and if they can find any kind of work he can do, they give him a job. Now that's all a new kind of theory. Handicapped people can do a lot of things. You know people think it is bad because of the devil. They think he made a lot of mistakes, but he's made a lot of good things happen, too. And in education that's another thing that happened in my lifetime. I don't take any credit for it at all. I was just lucky enough to be a part of it. In this telephone system there used to be a big man named Byrd. His boy got sick and was going to be out of school the rest of the year, and we put him on the telephone program. At the end of the year I got a letter from Mr. Byrd (I learned to know him real well because of this) thanking us for that program. He said his son would have lost a year of his life if it hadn't been for that. I think that still goes on. As far as I know, they still have it. So if a youngster is going to be home for a semester, or a year, or can't go to school, the telephone company is part of that program, too. They add their bit. They put in a special two-way phone so the youngster can sit right in his home and participate in school. So there has been a lot of gaps. I don't know, I think as far as the bad side is concerned, I have a feeling that there is a loss of respect among people today, particularly among races, religions perhaps, and certainly the old and the young, the rich and the poor. There is more to integration than just racial integration. We need to be integrated in a lot of ways, of course. Another thing that has made a tremendous difference in education and all through life is Old Pope John. I rate Pope John as one of the greatest persons in my lifetime (and I'm not Catholic) because he really changed the whole concept of Catholic life. Now, out at Lewis College when I went out there, I happened to be a Methodist. My friend said, "That's Christian Brothers' College." A lot of my



Methodist friends said to me, "How can you teach the Catholic college?" I said, "I teach out there just like I would at a Methodist college because that's the spirit today. Who give a hoot?" One of the best friends I had out there called Father Bersano took me under his wing. He really showed me the tricks so that as far as integration today in religious integration is concerned, it is practically being solved--all because of this old Pope John. You know I never saw a hair on a nun's head in my life until I went out to Lewis College and they raised the ban on that.

/Laughter/ There's a beautiful nun out there who taught a course in social science, sociology, and she had a little head gear that set back here and beautiful blond hair in front. I met her at the mailbox one day and I said, "You know, I love your hair." She said, "Oh, you old scuffer." /Laughter/ I wouldn't have said that to a nun fifty years ago, and she wouldn't have said anything back like that. So that's another gap all over the world. A year ago Golda Meir just visited the Pope. Who would have ever thought that the head of the Israel state would ever be indebted to the Pope audience. Now I think you young people shouldn't take these things for granted. They're here, and you grow up with them. You just think you have it. It's been here because there has been people in education and out of education that have just made things go that way, and there is still a long way to go. I think. . . racial integration will finally take place. Of course, Memphis--your dad came from Memphis--I don't know whether they still do it, but Memphis started an integration program that is my idea of an ideal. Instead of starting all through the schools, they just start in kindergarten. Now little kids, five years old, they don't care whether their playmate is black or white. They're absolutely free of prejudice. So they said we'll start this year and integrate the





kindergartens white and black all mixed together. Next year we'll move it up to first grade and we'll just let that integration go right through school with them. Now Memphis did that. I don't know whether they stayed with it or not. I hope they did, but that's my idea of the way to do it. The only reason kids are any racial or race-minded is because their parents are that way, because the old folks are like that, believe me. Just like this fellow that kicked against that first Negro teacher we had. The kids didn't kick. The older man, he kicked you see.

BARR: In your childhood did you have a family flood? A flood at one time in your family?

HUFFORD: A what?

BARR: A flood.

HUFFORD: On the Ohio River, oh yes. The worst flood was 1937. We lived back of the river. We lived about 3/4 of a mile from the river, and our farm land--we lived on a little knoll, a raised place--our farm land between the house and the river would be over-flooded about every third year. I remember one time the biggest boat on the river, a great big sag-wheeler boat came right across our farm land and landed in our front yard during a flood. Then in 1937 the biggest flood came. That's the only one that got into our house and up within two feet of the ceiling. I was in Hanover; I was a senior. I remember it because that last game we were going to play the Bumper College. My two brothers and I were all going to get to play in the same game. We had never been in the same game because both brothers were fullbacks, and for that last game one of them was going to play halfback and I was playing guard. So we were looking forward to



that game on Saturday. Thursday night it started raining, and it rained all day Saturday. And my dad called up--Friday and said, "You are going to have to come home because we are losing corn. Our corn crops are going under water." So we were going to miss that last game. So we hiked out and went home. But it rained so hard they had to call the game off and that flood was the biggest one the Ohio ever had. My family had to move out. We had to go home and help move them out. At that time, 1937, I was here in Joliet so I just had to leave. I went down home; my brothers they left, too. We got down there, we just moved folks out and moved them back in. There's some good about those floods, too, in those river bottoms. Because they overflow, it slows up the current; and it drops land on land so that we get about two feet of new soil everytime the flood came. So we had a wonderful fertile field just because of that, but those floods were something. . .

BARR: Is there anything else you have in your mind about your childhood?

HUFFORD: Well, at the time I guess we might have thought it was hard. We never had any vehicles. The first buggy we got was when my oldest brother started to high school. Up until that time we just rode horseback. My mother used to go to town to do her shopping on a horse. And I don't remember this, but the neighbors said with one kid in front and a kid behind carrying a great big market basket. She would ride to town in a sidesaddle, do the shopping for a week, come back home. When my oldest brother started to high school, they got a buggy. That's the first buggy we ever had. We never had a car until I was through college. The first car I owned was when I left St. Charles to come to Joliet. I bought a second-hand 1914 Ford to come down here and look for a place to live. That's the first car I had. So moneywise we didn't have money. But no-





body in our neighborhood had it. We were all farmers. We all lived the same. Everybody liked everybody. The last day of school we had a big dinner. Everybody went to the church that stood by the school. School in this yard, church in the next yard. Community life is all around the school and the church, particularly the church. While we didn't have money, we had food, we had all we needed--just raised it, you know. We raised potatoes and buried them. Had them all year. We had dried apples, and dried peaches, and dried corn, and dried beets, and canned fruit. My mother used to can at least 200 quarts of fruit every year for us to live on through the winter. So today I think you would think of it as hard times, but we didn't think of it as hard times. Christmas time each kid had a dollar to buy presents with, and my next younger brother and I--we grew up like twins almost--we always went to town to buy our presents. He had a dollar and I had a dollar. We went to Mr. Dunkel's store and Mr. Dunkel told us after we grew up that he always wanted to take charge of us because he just wanted to see how we were going to do it. So I take a nickel and he'd take a nickel and we'd buy a handkerchief for somebody for a dime, see. So we had to buy presents for my mother, my father, two grandparents, the grandmother, brothers, and sisters. How are you going to do that with a dollar? I don't know how we did it, but we did. We hung up our stocking and we got an orange at the bottom of every stocking. That's the only orange I got all year. And this fellow and I would divide one orange on Christmas Day and we'd save the other one for the next day so we would have oranges two days of the year, see. And they'd have a little of this hard candy and one toy; that was Christmas. We went out and cut our own Christmas tree. We always cut red cedar. The hills were covered with them. And we hung up our stockings. Had a Christmas tree



with real candles on it, set by the fireside. Had our Christmas party Christmas morning. So it was real good. And we hunted, we fished, and we swam. We had a little baseball team that played everyday it rained. We couldn't play in good weather; we had to farm. But whenever it rained, we got to play baseball. That's the way we grew up. I don't know if you remember Charlie Crawford or not. Do you remember Charlie Crawford who used to be at Barrett's?

BARR: No.

JACOBS: The name sounds familiar.

HUFFORD: He was the second man for Barrett's Hardware. He lives out in Missouri now. He grew up the same way, so we exchanged Christmas cards. And two years ago Charlie from Missouri sent me a great big orange about so big about as big as a grapefruit. Said, "I just want you to remember how it used to be." Now you can go out to Honiotes' and get oranges and even roast ears. Boy we had roast ears night before last for supper. Imagine that. Strawberries any day of the year. . . Not in the old days. You ate them in season, and that was it unless you canned them. No deep freeze. . . we did have an icehouse. We built an icehouse so it. . . Out here on the farm during the winter when the ice would get about so thick, we'd get the neighbors to help. And we'd fill this icehouse with ice, and we'd have it all summer. Every Sunday we'd have ice cream; we'd make it ourselves. The meat market in town--this little town--they came down and bought ice to keep their meat. So they came to our farm to buy it. So we had the icehouse which meant a lot to us. . . Most people didn't have that.

BARR: Was there any times as a superintendent where you really had to





fight for something? Where you were up against a large amount of opposition from the town or from the board?

HUFFORD: Well, this. . . fight for the unit system we had more than half the town for us, but more than half against--about half against us. The high school was against us, of course. The high school teachers were against us. I think that's one thing that I had the most opposition to. I had opposition with the board once. I. . . One reason we never had trouble with teachers, when we had money increases, we gave it. So I remember one year Gordon Skeel, this wonderful business manager, came about a little bit later this year, along about April. He said, "I think we can give the teachers a \$200 raise." So the board meeting at the first of May I recommended that we give the teachers a \$200 raise, and there were 3 or 4 young fellows on the board went right up in the air. I didn't have any right to give them raises; that was their job. So they fought it. They really fought it. Then the Teachers' Union and the Teachers' Organization, both organizations, of course, they got up in arms. And it got to be pretty serious. We finally had a meeting over at Washington School. I was on vacation up in Michigan. I got a long distance call to come back home, that they were really having trouble. So I cut my vacation short and came back and had a meeting at Washington School. I go to vote whether to give this \$200 raise or not and . . . Mr. Olson. . . the undertaker (just died recently) used to have the Olson Funeral Home, and later had this one up on the west side--he made a motion that they give the raise. And another friend of the idea seconded it, and I heard one of these young fellows say to the other, "Now what are you going to do?" He said, "We had better both vote for it or we're going to have a riot." So they voted for it, and they carried it. We got out on that deal. That was really a



nasty one.

BARR: Do you remember the date for that, when that was?

HUFFORD: That was the late '50's . . . I never had any trouble with the board until that one. These young fellows got on the board and their idea was to get rid of all of us, Geissler, and the supervisor, Gordon Skeel. Gordon Skeel was so good he used to be a businessman for the high school, too. And they finally asked him, "Don't you want to go to high school? Put your full time over there?" He said, "No, I'd rather stay down here. I like to work with Gayle." So it dragged on, and I retired in 1958 right while it was going on. . . But I had 55 years, and I liked it all. I can't say that I ever disliked teaching. I liked it, and I particularly liked coaching. I loved to coach. I had some bad experiences with that, too. I coached /Laughter/ St. Charles when they played Wheaton one time with Red Grange. He was at Wheaton; he was a senior. I hated to be the substitute of that one. He was the whole game. . I took a team from Paw Paw down to Mendover one time. There was a fellow down there played a halfback with the regular University of Chicago football. So I had a pretty tough deal coaching. We had a lot of fun. . . I think that's another thing that teachers ought to do, even if it's for a selfish point of view, just to be identified with student groups. It is just human. You know I had charge of all the people that are learning to teach out at Lewis. While I was there, 300 or 400 went through the education department that are now teaching. A lot of them right around here love it in Joliet--Lewis graduates. And I used to tell them. I said, "When you go on to teach, besides teaching your subject, volunteer to take charge of something in your student organization. Because if you do, they're going





to recognize you as somebody that's for them. At least there, you see, and they're going to be for you. Just solved one of your problems. I believe that. That's particularly true of coaching. Very few coaches ever have trouble with this one. But most kids, you know, they have an admiration for a coach. Well, that's true in all the walks of life. We misuse this word "love" a lot, but it's a good word; and a lot of young people are now using it. It's a good word. The more of that you have, the less trouble you're going to have, I'll tell you that. . .

BARR: Well, do you have any more questions for him?

JACOBS: No.

BARR: Do you have anything you'd like to say just before we conclude, as a messenger?

HUFFORD: Well, I think the thing you're doing is well worth while. I think there ought to be a written history of Will County. When I retired, I wrote an annual report for. . . (every year the superintendent writes an annual report). . . I made a large one covering the whole 20 years that I was superintendent. But when I was trying to get information about the schools of Will County, there were just two. One was written by a man named Woodruff. That's down in the library; it's about so thick, just a pamphlet; and another one, I forget who wrote that one. Another man by the name of Maue wrote one while he was county superintendent, just about so thick. There's no such thing as a history of Will County or the history of the schools of Will County. Now I don't know if you know the business manager out at Lewis, Les Farrington. Your dad knows him, I know. Les Farrington was head of the business office at Lewis and he was going to



Northern and DeKalb to work for Dr. Sagre. He asked me one day, he said, "What will I write my cases on?" I said "Write them on the history of the schools of Will County." And he thought I was joking; but I talked him into it. And he finally did write one that was so thick, and he gave me an autographed copy of it. That's the only real history of the schools in Will County that I know of. There's no history of Will County aside from that that I know of. Now you fellows, or your organization, the group you have working on this, you might finally expand this and produce a real history of Will County. There have been a lot of important people in this county. A lot of your important things have happened here. Here's this canal; the Woodruff history of Will County places a lot of emphasis on the canal when it was in operation. In fact, he drove one of the mules. He helped pull the boats up and down this old waterway. Right now there is an effort to save the canal. It might disappear. There's so many things in this county that are old and important. Plainfield was one time bigger than Joliet and a more important town than Joliet. The only thing that helped Joliet was the Rock Island Railroad, and a couple of railroads came this way instead of going to Plainfield. That made the difference. So, I'd love to see a history of Will County written. I think this might be the beginning of an effort to do that. But I think it's a real good thing you're doing. I don't know how many people you're interviewing. But I know there are a lot of others who can tell you a lot that I haven't been able to tell you about some of the old things, people grew up here.

BARR: We'd be very happy to get a list of people if you would know them.

HUFFORD: Well, I'm trying to think of somebody who lives here. There's Dr. George Woodruff has retired. He has a lot of time. He's been a part





of a lot of things here. He's very active in conservation and history. And his father, old Dr. Harry Woodruff, was here years before that, so Dr. George Woodruff would be my number one recommendation for you. I've learned a lot about Joliet before I came here from him. His wife grew up here, too, as far as that's concerned. Her name was Leach, the Leach Lumber Company. There's another fellow, Robert Pilcher, whose dad gave Pilcher Park the statues. Bob served on the park board for a number of years. He grew up here. I'm satisfied that Bob could tell you quite a bit, particularly about that. I learned a lot from a man named Ferris, who was editor of the Herald-News, a hard boiled man, I loved the guy. He was a great collector. . . . J. T. . . . Did you go to J. T. ?

BARR: J. T. West.

HUFFORD: Well, J. T. Central used to have a snake collection there.

Every skin and every kind found in the U. S. Ferris collected those himself and he also collected cactus. They're out at the greenhouse. That whole cactus collection is the Ferris Collection. He used to come to see me, and he was the editor of the Herald-News. He told me one time, just to show you how hard-boiled he was, there was a house of ill-fame opened up on Eastern Avenue just south of Cass Street just north of the high school. And he put an article in the paper, said there's a house of ill-fame, we called it back in the old days, and that the city officials should do something about it. Nothing was done. So about a month later he put a notice in and he said, "I notice some of the business people of Joliet are frequenting this house." Nothing was done. He said, "Unless this house is closed down, I shall print the names of some of these people that are going to this house." It was closed down the next



day. He told me one time that a fellow sat across his desk from him with his gun and said, "I'm going to shoot you if you publish that." He said, "You just as well shoot because it's already in the mails; it's going through." He said he was going to take a snake-collecting trip down in-- to Kentucky one time--down in the hills of Kentucky. And they ran on to a moonshine still. And they thought he was a revenue officer, and they were going to kill him; and he finally convinced them that he was just collecting snakes so he ate with them and got visiting with them. And when he went to leave, they asked him if there was anything they could give him to remember them by. And there was an old copper kettle about so big around, all hammered up, cut holes in it. He said, "What's that kettle?" They said, "Well, the revenue officers cut that. That's one of our brewing kettles, and they wrecked it for us." He said, "Well, I'd like to have that." So that was at J. T. It's probably still there. So there's this guy; look what he did for Joliet. You never heard of him probably before. He was quite a guy. I learned a lot from him. . . Johnny Lux was the editor of the Herald-News for years. He grew up in Joliet. He probably could tell you a lot. In fact, I know he could. He's the newspaperman. He probably knows more than anybody else would. And he's retired, so he has time. Johnny Lux and Dr. George Woodruff are the two best ones I can think of. . . I wish you a lot of luck on it. Whatever you do with it, I think it's a good deal.

BARR: We'd like to thank you very much. You've been very helpfu.

HUFFORD: You're certainly welcome.

BARR: Yours will be one of the first of the interviews in this program.





JACOBS: So, what we'll do is have this transcribed and it will be typewritten and we'll bring a copy back to you and you'll have the option to delete anything you like out of it.

HUFFORD: Fine, I'll make some corrections, no doubt.



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